CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for masking version differences among a plurality of applications providing similar services over a network, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving, at an application switching component from a requesting process, a request for a service among the similar services, wherein the request includes data indicating a particular service extension is mandatory;

sending the request to a first application of the plurality of applications;

receiving, at the application switching component in response to sending the request to the first application, error data that indicates the particular service extension is not available at the first application; and

in response to receiving the error data, sending the request from the application switching component to a second application of the plurality of applications, wherein the second application is different from the first application.

2. A method as recited in Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

determining at the application switching component whether none of the plurality of applications has the particular service extension; and

if it is determined that none has the particular service extension, then sending, to the requesting process, error data indicating the particular service extension is not available.

3. A method as recited in Claim 2, further comprising the step of:

if it is determined that at least one of the plurality of applications has the particular service extension, then not sending, to the requesting process, error data indicating the particular service extension is not available.

4. A method as recited in Claim 1, wherein:

said step of receiving the request for services is performed by receiving a request formatted according to the Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP); and

the data indicating the particular service extension is mandatory is included in a mustUnderstand attribute associated with the particular service extension.

5. A method as recited in Claim 1, further comprising the step of:
sending to the requesting process advertising data indicating that another service that appears to be assembled out of the similar services is available at a network address of the application-switching component.

6. A method as recited in Claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
determining at the application switching component whether a timeout period has occurred; and
if the timeout period has occurred, then sending, to the requesting process, error data indicating that the particular service extension is not available.

7. A computer-readable medium carrying one or more sequences of instructions for masking version differences among a plurality of applications providing similar services over a network, wherein execution of the one or more sequences of instructions by one or more processors causes the one or more processors to perform the steps of;
receiving a request for a service among the similar services, wherein the request includes data indicating a particular service extension is mandatory;
sending the request to a first application of the plurality of applications;
receiving, in response to sending the request to the first application, error data that indicates the particular service extension is not available at the first application; and
in response to receiving the error data, sending the request to a second application of the plurality of applications, wherein the second application is different from the first application.

8. A computer-readable medium as recited in Claim 7, wherein execution of the one or more sequences of instructions by one or more processors further causes the one or more processors to perform the steps of:
determining whether none of the plurality of applications has the particular service extension; and

if it is determined that none has the particular service extension, then sending, to the requesting process, error data indicating the particular service extension is not available.

9. A computer-readable medium as recited in Claim 8, wherein execution of the one or more sequences of instructions by one or more processors further causes the one or more processors to perform the step of:
if it is determined that at least one of the plurality of applications has the particular service extension, then not sending, to the requesting process, error data indicating the particular service extension is not available.

10. A computer-readable medium as recited in Claim 7, wherein:
said step of receiving the request for services is performed by receiving a request formatted according to a Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP); and
the data indicating the particular service extension is mandatory is included in a mustUnderstand attribute associated with the particular service extension.

11. A computer-readable medium as recited in Claim 7, wherein execution of the one or more sequences of instructions by one or more processors further causes the one or more processors to perform the step of:
sending to the requesting process advertising data indicating that the similar services are available at a network address of the application switching component.

12. A computer-readable medium as recited in Claim 6, wherein execution of the one or more sequences of instructions by one or more processors further causes the one or more processors to perform the steps of:
determining at the application switching component whether a timeout period has occurred; and
if the timeout period has occurred, then sending, to the requesting process, error data indicating that the particular service extension is not available.

13. An apparatus for masking version differences among a plurality of applications providing similar services over a network, comprising:

means for receiving from a requesting process a request for a service among the similar services, wherein the request includes data indicating a particular service extension is mandatory;

means for sending the request to a first application of the plurality of applications;

means for receiving error data that indicates the particular service extension is not available at the first application; and

means for sending the request to a second application of the plurality of applications in response to receiving the error data, wherein the second application is different from the first application.

14. An apparatus for masking version differences among a plurality of applications providing similar services over a network, comprising:

a network interface that is coupled to the network for receiving requests from a requesting process;

a processor connected to the network interface;

one or more stored sequences of instructions which, when executed by the processor, cause the processor to carry out the steps of:

receiving from a requesting process a request for a service among the similar services, wherein the request includes data indicating a particular service extension is mandatory;

sending the request to a first application of the plurality of applications;

receiving error data that indicates the particular service extension is not available at the first application; and

sending the request to a second application of the plurality of applications, wherein the second application is different from the first application.

15. A system for masking version differences among a plurality of applications providing similar services over a network, comprising:

a network interface that is coupled to the network for receiving requests from and sending responses to a requesting process;

a processor;

a plurality of stored sets of one or more sequences of instructions corresponding to the plurality of applications providing similar services when executed by the processor; and

an application switching component connected between the processor and the network interface, the application switching component configured to carry out the steps of:

receiving from the requesting process a request for a service among the similar services, wherein the request includes data indicating a particular service extension is mandatory;

sending the request to the processor while executing a first application of the plurality of applications;

receiving error data that indicates the particular service extension is not available at the first application; and

sending the request to the processor while executing a second application of the plurality of applications, wherein the second application is different from the first application.

16. A method for masking version differences among a plurality of computer program servers providing similar services over a network, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving, at an application switching component from a requesting client, a SOAP message that includes a request for a service among the similar services, wherein the request includes a mustUnderstand attribute indicating a particular service extension is mandatory;

sending the request to a first server of the plurality of servers;

receiving, at the application switching component in response to sending the request to the first application, a mustUnderstand error value that indicates the particular service extension is not available at the first server; and

in response to receiving the error data, selecting a second server of the plurality of applications that is different from the first server;

sending the request from the application switching component to the second server.

17. A method as recited in Claim 16, further comprising the step of sending a mustUnderstand error message to the requesting client only when no second server is capable of selection.